

house would get rid of him, when in the way, by saying 'Go and see if I am in the kitchen', whereupon the little Gustave would trot off to the cook—'Pierre told me to come and see if he was here'—and remain dreamily mystified by the laughter that met him in reply.

Why should a person not be in two places at once? Here was a first entanglement with that Reality whose fantastic stupidity and strangeness was to be the passion and the hate, even more the hate than the passion, of all his life. It was not so much that he recoiled from its cruelty, or was enraged by its injustice: it was the grotesque fatuity of life that at once nauseated and fascinated him; just as some scientist might give himself, with mingled repugnance and curiosity, to study with microscope and scalpel the life-history of lice.

For Flaubert lived at war with the world. He both loathed and feared it. From that passion in him comes much of the vigour of his work; much also of its weakness. Throughout these eight volumes of letters runs almost an Oriental mystic's aversion for the wheel of things, for the lying lure of earthly happiness: *cet horrible mot bonheur'; *le bonheur est une monstruosité'; le diable . . . c'est lui qui a inventé cette idée-là pour faire enrager le genre humain'; 'celui, dit Qakia Mouni, qui a compris que la douleur vient de l'attachement, se retire dans la solitude comme le rhinocéros'. He admires Origen's self-

mutilation: one should never marry, nor
have children,
nor feel (this in a love-letter to his mistress)
more affection
than one can help. Action is merely bestial.
Yet to stop
and think is to risk slipping into suicidal
melancholy. One
should lead the cabbage-life of a
bourgeois, burn off
one side of one's breast like an Amazon,
vow virginity
like a priest, in order to live wholly in that
ideal world of
Art where alone is salvation, or at least
forgetfulness—